

NEWSLETTER FOR COLLEGE STAFF

AUTUMN 2019



Message from Leigh Powell, UNISON National Officer for FE

Adult education has taken a massive hit in the past decade across the UK with a huge cut in funding meaning far fewer opportunities are available. This newsletter looks at some of the issues this raises. Everyone who works in a college knows how important adult learning is – for individuals, for communities and for the wider economy. Research demonstrates that people who engage with learning opportunities as adults enjoy better mental health, are more tolerant of difference, are more democratically engaged, and are more productive. Retirees who keep learning are more likely to be independent, working-age adults are more likely to be in secure and better-paid employment and offenders are less likely to reoffend.

In this newsletter, find out how a careers advisor helps learners to be more resilient, read about the current findings from the Lifelong Learning Commission on the need to upskill and retrain throughout our working lives, and bag your place on our professional development seminar in the spring!

Help grow our union and you could win £500 to share with a colleague!

We all know there's strength in numbers. UNISON already represents nearly 30,000 members working in further education and sixth form colleges across the UK.

But the more colleagues we can encourage to join our union, the stronger our voice will be in the fight for a fair pay rise, proper college funding and secure jobs.

So this month if you get a colleague to join UNISON you'll be entered into a prize draw to win £250 for yourself and £250 for them! There are 10 of these prizes up for grabs nationwide.

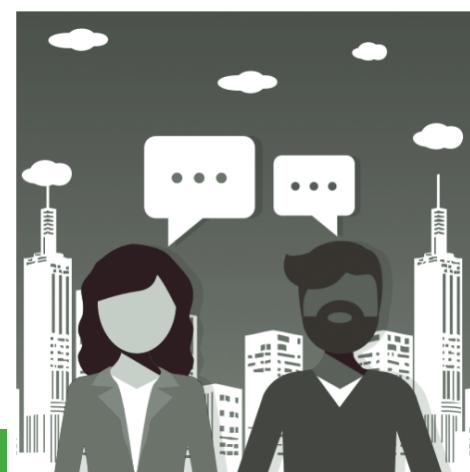
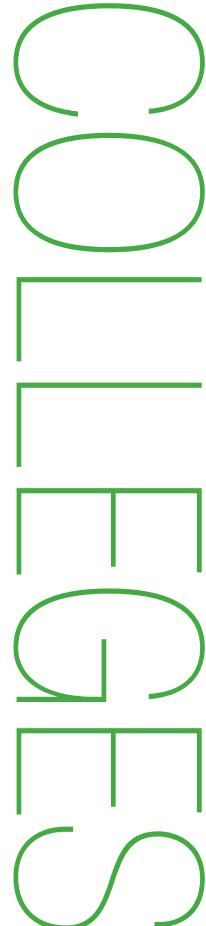
Keep your eyes peeled for an email from us inviting you to take part, or visit unison.org.uk/collegesprizedraw

Remember, UNISON represents the whole college support staff team – from roles in training and assessment, advisors, library services, facilities, specialist learning support, catering, IT, finance and procurement, technicians, administration, business support... and many more.

So there are hundreds of staff members in your college who'd benefit from joining UNISON – and the chance to win a £250 prize!

Grow our union and get yourselves in the running for a lovely pre-Christmas present.

**[unison.org.uk/
collegesprizedraw](http://unison.org.uk/collegesprizedraw)**



go for *
growth
*growing a stronger union

*If you have an issue about further education that you would like Leigh to cover in future newsletters, please email:
education@unison.co.uk*

Pay updates

England

This year's pay claim calls on the employers to make an offer that shows they recognise the true worth of staff working in colleges. The claim submitted by the joint unions is:

- £1 per hour for all staff
- All staff to be paid the Foundation Living Wage as a minimum
- An additional 5 days of annual leave per year

The employers' side are yet to make an offer and pay negotiations are set to resume in November.

Wales

The 2019/20 pay claim was submitted to CollegauCymru in June. The pay claim seeks a cost of living increase after years of below inflation pay rises as well as redressing the differential pay award last year that saw some support staff receiving a pay award lower than teaching colleagues.

The pay claim is for:

- 5% across the board for all staff
- 2% for all support staff who received a 2% increase last year

Negotiations resume this term.



Scotland

Job evaluation

2019 has seen the completion by support staff across 21 colleges of an individual job evaluation questionnaire. UNISON had 6 members released on full time facility time during that period to assist the process and hundreds of new members joined. UNISON will have 10 panellists sitting on joint national scoring panels from November. A joint pay and grading working group, in parallel, will consider possible grading models for implementation with effect from 1 September 2018 (retrospective). The Scottish Government is providing £12 million for the negotiations.

Trade union seats on boards



The Scottish government will institute the necessary regulations to introduce trade union seats on college boards with effect from 1 September 2020 in addition to the pre-existing staff seats.

Sixth form colleges

UNISON has submitted a claim to the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) calling for:

- A substantial increase on all salary scales and allowances with a commitment to a 'Living Wage' for all staff.
- A review of the support staff salary spine
- An increase in the support staff standards payment
- An additional day's leave for all support staff
- Harmonisation of London weighting areas

The first meeting with the SFCA will be on 30 October and we will update branches again following that meeting.

What resilience really means – thoughts from a careers advisor

Sarfraz Ahmad is a careers advisor at Leicester College and a UNISON Learning Representative. Careers advice has suffered from swingeing cuts over the past decade, despite its vital role in ensuring that learners can make the best use of their potential. Here Sarfraz shares his thoughts on his role.

If you had asked me ten years ago what resilience truly means, I may not have been able to give you a heartfelt answer. I would probably have been searching frantically on Google! In recent years, working in further education has put my ability to be resilient to the test, both professionally and personally. Today, working in further education means that you not only teach resilience, but live and breathe it.

In 2019, resilience is at the heart of the curriculum, on the government's

agenda and in the new Ofsted Inspection Framework. Personal guidance is all about supporting learners to become more resilient and to be able to manage change and transition. In fact, resilience is one of the many core skills employers are looking for; the ability to never give up and to keep going amongst turbulence and change.

This has never been truer than in the current climate. The government has reduced funding for further education and we have consistently taken on more and more, for a lot less. So how do you these changes affect you? Do you bend or break, or are you resilient? Mental and physical strength are both important. In these difficult times, look for chances to develop yourself, so that when opportunities arise you are in a strong position to move forward with your career.

If you asked me today what resilience truly means, I'd give a different answer to the one I gave ten years ago. As a professional careers advisor and as a UNISON Learning Representative, I practise resilience every day with the advice I give, advocating a positive mindset that allows us to not only survive, but to thrive in further education. Be strong, resilient and never give up – and fight for what we believe in.

We love to hear from our members. If you would like to contribute an article to the colleges newsletter in 2020, please contact us at education@unison.co.uk.



2020 Colleges Professional Development Seminar

Keen to meet like-minded colleagues from across the UK?

Do you want a chance to think about your own development away from the bustle of daily working life?

Would you like to discuss how we can build the union to make your voice stronger?

Well, have we got the event for you!

Applications are now open for next year's Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges seminar. We've packed the agenda with engaging sessions to aid your own professional development and helpful advice on encouraging your colleagues to become more active in UNISON.

When? 20 – 21 March 2020

Where? UNISON Centre in central London

How do I secure my place?

Contact your UNISON branch who will book you on!

Take it from last year's delegates...

"Excellent presentations. As ever, much to take away from this event – both presentations and networking"

"Very enjoyable weekend"

"Very good speakers and workshops. Great to speak to reps from other countries and see what similarities there are in our various regions"



New National FE Branch in Scotland

Members turned out in droves (in person and via video conference) to our inaugural general meeting on 1 October 2019 to witness the historic birth of the UNISON Scotland Further Education Branch. Chris Greenshields of Glasgow Kelvin College is the first branch secretary, and Collette Bradley of New College Lanarkshire is chair. Our first branch meeting is on 31 October.

This new national branch of 2,688 members will send delegates to the Scottish and UK local government conferences and the UK-wide



national delegate conference. As a sector, FE will retain seats on Scottish standing committees including the Scottish committee, health and safety, and learning and organising.

Thank you for keeping in touch!

Thank you so much to all of you that took the time to respond to this year's keeping in touch survey. By letting us know your issues and concerns on a regular basis we can target our campaigning, resources and media work effectively to make sure that the right ears hear about what needs to change.

This year the three main concerns across the UK were pay (by a considerable way); job security/ restructures and workload. College funding was a close fourth and it can be argued that the top three issues are all caused by lack of funding for the main part. Results in Scotland differed from the other nations as pay took second place to workload.

You had lots of positive comments about your jobs too, with over 72% of respondents choosing 'making a difference to students' lives' and 59% identifying their supportive colleagues as one of the best things about their job.

As well as the concerns above, a very high number of you pinpointed unsupportive management (particularly in Scotland) and unrealistic expectations as negative elements of your job.

Most members had accessed general statutory training; safeguarding,

Prevent, health and safety and equalities but less than half had received any job-specific training (46%) or opportunities to take accredited courses (32%).

Proportionally fewer respondents than in previous years reported that they are struggling to pay for basics, although the proportions are still higher than we would want. However, every question that asked if people needed to find extra finances from outside of their basic rate of pay (i.e. an extra job, borrowing or benefits) saw an increased response of between 1% and 2%. In Wales, where fewer people took on extra work for an outside employer (6% compared to 11% in England and Scotland) many more people reported needing to borrow.

It is great to hear from so many members about how much they love their jobs. We can see that the problems of low pay and overwork in our colleges still need to be tackled, and we will work with other relevant campaigning organisations to raise these issues nationally and locally. Now there is finally some more money going into the system we will work to make sure it is used to reward dedicated support staff for the vital work they do, day in day out.

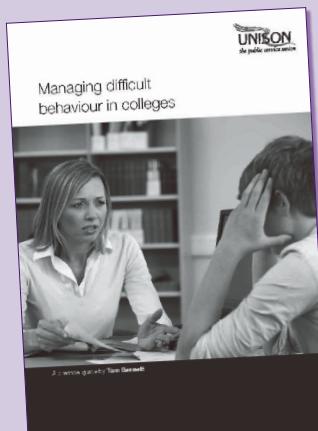
Behavioural issues in Welsh colleges

In response to increase reports by members of what is acceptable student behaviour the FE unions ran a survey to collect data to provide the evidence base to raise this matter with the Minister.

75% of staff who responded said they had experienced challenging, disruptive or violent behaviour by a student last year. This impacted upon staff in a number of ways with the most common being work disruption (53%); stress (48%); anxiety (41%); consideration of change of job (40%) or profession (33%); loss of confidence in the classroom (33%).

The survey found that student behaviour issues are a significant problem within FE institutions and manifest in an array of ways. These issues have a detrimental effect upon staff, both on a professional and personal level. The survey results highlighted the absence of sufficient and quality staff training to be a real issue. Despite the existence of student behaviour policies within FE institutions, the survey results indicate that these are not being properly or consistently implemented, with a high level of staff dissatisfaction with their institutions response when student behaviour issues are reported.

UNISON asked Tom Bennett, the government's behaviour tsar, to write a guide for UNISON members on how to deal with difficult behaviour in colleges. This is available to download from the student behaviour section at unison.org.uk/colleges, or from the UNISON Shop with stock number 3895.



Offensive Weapons in Colleges



Earlier this year we conducted a survey asking if you felt learners bringing weapons such as knives into colleges was a problem in your workplace. Fortunately, most of you have not had to deal with anything of this nature in your careers to date. However there are still many concerns.

A significant proportion of you feel it is a growing problem and a great number of you told us that you had not received training nor know what you should do if you

were in a dangerous situation. This is not good enough. UNISON has now produced guidance for all of its organisers with responsibilities in colleges on how to approach an employer in an organisation where staff do not feel safe. This is available to download from the student behaviour section at unison.org.uk/colleges, or from the UNISON Shop with stock number 4111.

Ask a union rep to get in contact with your branch if you feel this is an issue that needs to be addressed – your safety and welfare is paramount to UNISON.

UNISON defends local government pensions – again

Over the summer, the government consulted on its plans to let universities and colleges choose not to offer the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) to new staff. UNISON responded to the consultation, warning this would create a two-tier workforce, locking out new colleagues from a decent pension scheme and particularly affecting women and those on lower pay. We also cautioned that the plans are the thin end of the wedge, and that more changes like these could risk the future sustainability of all local government pensions. Thank you to the hundreds of members who joined the campaign to defend the LGPS by asking their MPs to pressure the government to drop its damaging plans. The government is currently considering the consultation responses and we will update you on its response.

Government plans would create a two-tier workforce

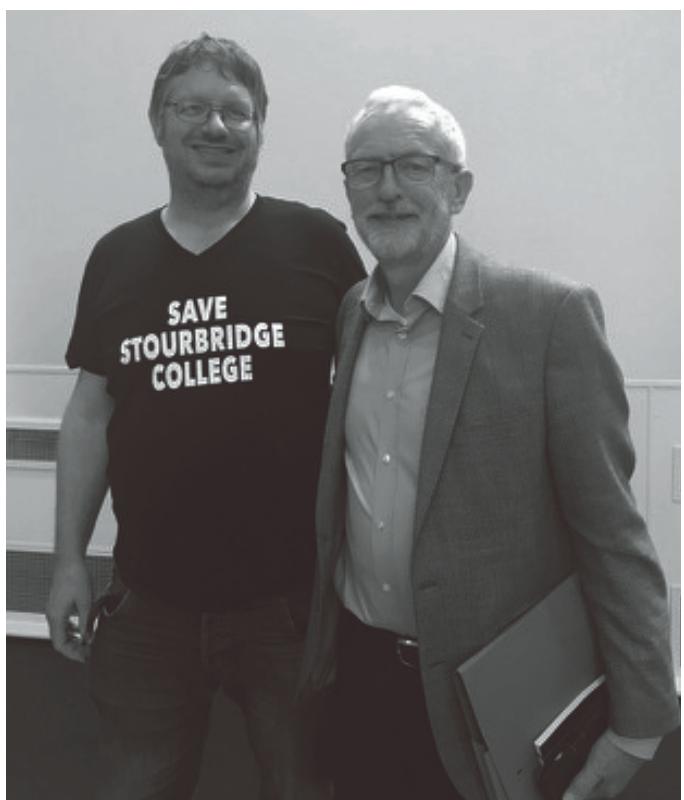


Lifelong learning and a National Education Service in England

The Labour Party has published an interim report from its lifelong learning commission. The report argues that current adult learning is disjointed, narrow and prescriptive. Funding for adult learning has fallen by nearly half in the past ten years and this has led to a 'catastrophic loss' of people aged 19 or over in further education. In 2004 there were 4.7 million learners aged 19+ compared to 2.2 million in 2016.

This is why Labour is committed to introducing a new 'national education service' (NES) if it comes to power at the next election. Like the NHS it will be free at the point of use for anyone at any stage in their life, as and when they need it. The 'job for life' does not exist these days and has not done so for a long time. So how do we upskill and retrain to take advantage of the opportunities offered in a changing economy? At the moment, the choice is to take on a pile of debt and find the training yourself – or get left behind. A NES will allow young people and adults alike to take the courses they need to take advantage of new opportunities.

The chair of the UNISON FE and sixth form committee Gavin Cartwright had the opportunity to feed ideas into how the NES could work when he attended a national consultation forum with Angela Raynor, the Shadow Education Secretary and Jeremy Corbyn, the Leader of the Opposition. We all know how wonderful the college sector could be with proper funding and a proper commitment to decent further education from those in charge of the nation's education policy. And with a passionate advocate like Gavin putting forward our case we look forward to seeing colleges becoming the leaders of delivering social justice through education in the UK.



Mental Health in Colleges in England

Protecting the mental health of learners in colleges has rightly become a big issue in the past few years. There are an increasing number of resources available to help staff who deal with learners who may be experiencing problems with their mental health on a day-to-day basis. What we don't hear so much about is colleges' responsibilities as employers to protect the mental health of their staff.

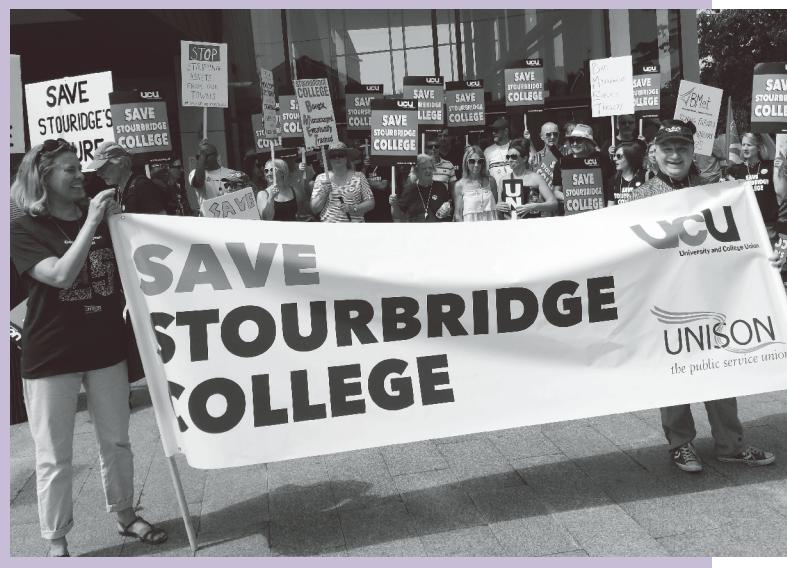
That is why UNISON is teaming up with the Association of Colleges, UCU, NEU, the Education Support Partnership and the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust to look into how colleges can better support their staff. This group has already met twice and will meet once more. We are jointly identifying and developing resources to support colleges to develop effective approaches to support mental health and wellbeing.



If you would like to share your views on this issue, then please contact the further education team at education@unison.co.uk. In the meantime – watch this space!

Save Stourbridge College!

Staff and learners at Stourbridge College have been forced to pay the price for the financial mismanagement at BMET College group after its site was put up for sale for a huge loss in the Summer. UNISON are playing a big part in the Save Stourbridge College campaign led by West Midlands mayoral candidate Pete Lowe. Stourbridge saw the largest march it has ever seen when hundreds took to the streets on a boiling hot day in June to protest against the loss of further education provision in the town. Of course we are also using UNISON's excellent legal team for advice. We need to ensure justice for the community and young people of Stourbridge!



Not in UNISON? It's time to join the experts!

UNISON represents only support staff in colleges – all of our further education resources are directly focused on securing the best for support staff and the specific issues that you have.

By joining UNISON, the UK's largest union, you will have the backing of:

- Expert legal advice should you need it
- Our annual college seminar discussing the issues that matter to you
- Advice for you about workplace problems and representation when you need it
- Professional expert and guidance including publications on issues that matter to you
- Regional learning programmes helping you to make your voice heard
- Specialist advice on pensions, health and safety, equalities and discrimination
- A national FE and 6th Form Committee which agrees the union's priorities and leads in negotiations
- Regular updates on the latest college issues across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

All UNISON members have access to:

- UNISON's charity 'There for You' to help when times get tough – offering debt advice and financial assistance like school uniform grants
- UNISON's very own family-friendly Croyde Bay holiday resort offering 15% discounts for members, rising to 50% discounts for low-paid members
- Discounts on shopping, insurance, car breakdown cover and independent financial advice
- Free accredited training

Join online at joinunison.org or call 0800 171 2193



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